DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 840 PS 024 344

AUTHOR	Tadlock, Martin; Barrett-Roberts, Joan
TITLE	Middle Level Education in Small Rural Schools.
INSTITUTION	National Middle School Association, Columbus, OH.
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-56090-095-4
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	57p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Middle School Association, 2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Columbus, OH 43231.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescent Development; Adolescents; Case Studies; Curriculum Design; *Educational Change; *Educational Quality; Interdisciplinary Approach; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Program Effectiveness; *Rural Schools; School Restructuring; School Schedules; Staff Development; Student Needs; Team Teaching; Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS	*Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

Intended as a guidebook for middle level educators as they seek to institute educational experiences appropriate to the adolescents in their programs, this book discusses the issues and assets of middle school education in rural settings. Chapter 1 of the book is an introduction, discussing the concept of middle school as applied to small rural school settings. This chapter also discusses the advantages and challenges that small rural schools have over larger schools in achieving the middle school concept. Chapter 2 deals with middle school components in small rural schools, with emphasis on the comparison of small rural schools and non-rural schools. Chapter 3 describes a study carried out to ascertain organizational structure, issues, and proposed solutions for implementing middle level programs in small rural schools. Chapter 4 discusses how rural schools can pursue the solutions described in the previous chapter, which include professional development, curriculum and instruction, interdisciplinary teams, common planning time, block schedules, and advisory programs. Chapter 5 presents two case studies of small rural schools involved in the middle school movement. Chapter 6 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of small rural schools in meeting adolescent student needs and emphasizes the need for courage to risk failure as the foundation for educational change. Survey instruments from the study described in chapter 3 are appended. (MOK)

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Middle Level Education in Small Rural Schools

Middle Level Education in Small Rural Schools

by

Martin Tadlock

with

Joan Barrett-Roberts

National Middle School Association

nmsa ®

NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

Martin Tadlock, a former middle school teacher, is currently the Middle Education Specialist in the Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University in Logan. Dr. Tadlock formerly served at the University of Wisconsin–Platteville where he directed the Center of Education for the Young Adolescent and the MARS Project.

Joan Barrett-Roberts is an adjunct instructor in education at the University of Wisconsin–Platteville and a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

The Association appreciates their work in preparing this report on a long-neglected area of middle level education.

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ISBN 1-56090-095-4

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the following: Robert Stone, who was instrumental in the original site meetings where anecdotal comments and brainstorming took place at the grass roots level; members of the Middle Level Alliance of Rural and Small Schools (MARS) Project team: John Frattinger, Illinois; Fred Sanford, Minnesota; Linda Travis, Wisconsin; John Hiltunen, Wisconsin; Robert Boone, Iowa. And, of course, John Lounsbury for his tireless editorial assistance in seeing this monograph through to completion.

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Foreword

As the eminent American philosopher Charlie Brown once stated: "There is no greater burden than a great potential." Such indeed is the case for rural middle schools in America. While these schools may be remote in a geographical sense, they are not apt to be remote in terms of knowing your neighbors, interacting with young people outside of the school setting, and working side by side during community events and celebrations. It is these strengths, that in my judgment make it mandatory for rural middle schools to lead the nation in the adoption of those educational practices that comprise the middle school concept.

While it might be nice to have totally dedicated physical plants, rural middle level educators demonstrate daily that the strength of the middle school movement resides in our beliefs about young adolescents and our goals of working with them in developmentally appropriate ways.

The case studies in Chapter 5 of the monograph paint quite different pictures about the size and shape of the physical plant; yet, no reader will miss the common theme of "caring" within these settings.

The authors have ably portrayed the issues and assets of middle level education in rural settings. Chapter 2 will be of help to those educators attempting to distill the issues that exist in their school setting. The "possible solutions" section of Chapter 3 could immediately be placed into the dialogue of school improvement teams and curriculum councils used to bring about change in schools.

Returning to the case studies in Chapter 5 will make your step a bit lighter and your disposition a bit warmer after returning from meetings tinged with suspicion about moving forward with middle school concepts.

The issues facing us as educators are made clear in the opening chapter of the monograph. And I contend the remainder of the monograph will be a worthy guidebook as you and your colleagues face these issues as you seek to institute developmentally appropriate educational experiences. It will be a demanding journey that should be made a bit more comfortable by lessons learned from our colleagues in rural middle schools.

Dick Lipka, Chairperson
Rural and Small Schools Committee
NMSA

1

Why the middle school concept in small rural schools?

Today, many of America's most cherished values and some of our best educational practices are found in small rural schools. Yet these schools face an assault caused by federal and state funding shortages that force local communities to assume an ever-increasing percentage of school funding. This can be devastating to many small rural schools that have a meager tax base on which to draw. In addition, despite the fact that two-thirds of all U.S. schools are rural and enroll one-third of all students, spending of federal dollars continues to be targeted primarily at urban education (Helge, 1990).

The cause of this condition could lie in a basic misperception among policymakers concerning small rural schools. These schools are often viewed as an idyllic setting free from the problems of urban America – despite evidence to the contrary. In fact, our rural schools are now facing the same problems that exist in non-rural settings.

A 1990 study of at-risk students by the National Rural Development Institute at Bellingham, Washington, showed that rural students are more at-risk than non-rural students in thirty-four out of thirty-nine statistical comparisons (Helge, 1990). Poverty, family instability, depression and suicide, teen pregnancy, chemical abuse, employment declines, low self-esteem, and child abuse all were more prevalent in rural America than in non-rural America. According to Helge, the widely-held perception of the trouble-free, serene rural environment is clearly a myth.

Helge's research comes as no shock to those who work in rural schools. During an inquiry into the status of the middle level grades in small and rural upper midwest schools (MARS, 1992), anecdotal comments from rural school educators continually centered around a growing concern over the increasing number of at-risk behaviors exhibited by rural youth. Those comments supported Helge's research.

If at-risk behaviors among rural youth exist in rural areas to the extent measured by Helge's research and supported by educators' comments, then steps must be taken to enable educators to provide assistance to at-risk rural students. However, because of the unique constraints facing small rural schools, such steps must also benefit all students, not only those who may be identified as at-risk. This monograph suggests some steps that can be taken by small rural schools to address the needs of all students via the "middle school concept" and take greater advantage of the many benefits inherent in "smallness."

Focusing on the middle

According to the Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development's 1989 report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, middle level schools may be the most influential and the best places to help students who are at-risk of dropping out of both school and society. Yet many small rural schools have not taken steps to implement those recommendations. They often assume that their small size negates their ability to develop middle schools – an assumption that will be countered in this monograph.

For example, the Carnegie Task Force (1989), the National Middle School Association (1982), and recognized leaders in the middle school movement (Melton, 1991; Lounsbury & Vars, 1978) recommend that young adolescents know at least one significant, caring adult who can serve as an advisor. This is a basic tenet of the middle school philoso-

phy and can be facilitated more readily in small schools than in large schools that have to resort to some administrative arrangement in an effort to create smallness.

However, according to Alexander and McEwin (1989), only thirty-nine percent of schools with middle level grades in their buildings have advisor/advisee programs. Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) state that only twenty-eight percent of all middle level schools have established strong advisor/advisee programs. Finally, Rottier and Peppard (1990) reveal that only sixteen percent of Wisconsin rural schools with a grade configuration that included the ninth grade have established advisor/advisee programs. Clearly, teacher advisory programs are not in place in a majority of schools that house the middle level grades, including small rural schools.

The Carnegie Task Force also recommends that the middle level schools include interdisciplinary teams, block-of-time flexible schedules, and ample exploratory courses. These structural components are viewed as developmentally appropriate for middle school students and are supported throughout the literature as effective practices for the middle level grades.

Beyond the middle level grades, small rural schools may wish to consider implementing middle school structural components in grades nine and ten as well, something that an increasing number of high schools are currently doing. Doing so enables small rural schools to respond to the needs of an increasing population of at-risk students in the high school.

In fact, could the recommendations for middle level education guide the restructuring of all grades in our schools, whether rural or non-rural? We believe that they can and advocate that all schools implement the recommendations advocated by the Carnegie Task Force, the National Middle School Association, and other acknowledged leaders in the field. We believe that implementation of middle school structural components, undergirded by a strong philosophical

viewpoint, enables a school to promote success for all students. Small rural schools, generally more independent, could lead the way in the adoption of those middle level educational practices that are also applicable to other levels, especially the high school.

Positives and challenges

Small rural schools have several built-in advantages over larger and less personal schools. Smaller class sizes permit more individualized instruction, opportunities exist for cross-age groupings, and peer tutoring is more easily implemented. Greater opportunities for widespread student involvement in school activities exist in small schools; and a strong tie between the school and the community usually is prevalent. All of these conditions are ones advocated by today's educational reform leaders.

Despite these advantages, implementation of new structures presents an interesting set of problems that will be examined later in this monograph. Many rural schools have already overcome these problems and are now serving as visionary models. Chapter 5 presents detailed information of two such schools.

Generally agreed upon middle school components are complementary to many of the positives found in small rural schools, and their implementation further enhances a rural school's ability to address the specific needs of all their students. ❖

2

Middle school components and small rural schools

The Middle Level Alliance of Rural and Small Schools (MARS) Project, a two year inquiry sponsored by the Center of Education for the Young Adolescent (CEYA) at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, investigated the status of middle level education in small rural schools in Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The inquiry sought to: (1) identify the problems facing small rural schools when attempting implementation of the Carnegie Task Force recommendations; and (2) identify solutions to those problems. Schools with grade structures of K-12, K-8, or 7-12 were selected as the focus for the inquiry.

The project began in 1990 with half-day site meetings in each of the four upper midwest states. Here dialogue was initiated with educators from small rural schools containing middle level grades. The conversations were structured so that information coming from the meetings fell into three categories: positives of being small and rural; problems with the implementation of middle school philosophy and its structural components; and possible solutions to those problems. Over 125 educators from small rural schools participated in these dialogue sessions.

In 1991, a six-person team comprised of site participants from the four state dialogue sessions attended the UW-Platteville's Teaching the Transescent Seminar. The team's objective was to conduct interviews of rural educators and to survey all of the schools represented by teams that were attending the seminar. The same topics addressed in the site

meetings were used in the surveys and interviews with a focus on solutions to problems facing small schools when implementing middle school components.

Of the 123 schools attending the seminar, 53 were identified as rural and small according to Helge's (1990) definition. Since the MARS team felt that there would be common problems and solutions experienced by all schools implementing middle school structural components, all 123 schools were surveyed in order to compare rural and small schools with non-rural schools. Survey One (Appendix A), was largely a screening device used to select individual teacher teams for later interviews.

Of the 47 teams responding to Survey One, 25 were selected for individual team interviews. Those chosen were teams that indicated on the survey that their school had been or was currently involved in the implementation of such middle school components as interdisciplinary teams, block schedules, team houses, exploratory courses, no tracking, teacher advisory programs, a middle school grade configuration separated from the high school, and no shared staffing in core subjects with other levels.

Survey Two (Appendix B) asked teams to rank order the importance of middle school organization/structures to their school; problems facing their school; and a list of possible solutions to those problems. Space was available for anecdotal comments regarding problems, solutions, and needed changes in their schools.

Survey Two results

Of the 53 rural and 70 non-rural schools given the second survey, 40 rural and 32 non-rural schools returned the survey. The MARS team felt that common problems and solutions would be experienced by all schools attempting to implement middle school structural components in their

buildings. The survey data do reflect that there was a great deal of agreement between rural and non-rural schools.

❖ Fifty-five percent of all schools surveyed (both rural and non-rural) agreed that the top four middle school structural components that ought to be implemented (in order of importance) were:

1. interdisciplinary teams
2. block schedules
3. team houses
4. flexibility in scheduling

The other forty-five percent agreed with the above list, but were mixed in their rankings.

❖ Seventy percent of all schools (both rural and non-rural) agreed on the top four problems facing their school during implementation of middle school structural components as:

1. scheduling
2. limited physical facilities
3. low funding
4. shared staff

❖ Sixty-five percent of all schools (both rural and non-rural) agreed on the top four solutions to those problems:

1. staff in-service programs
2. teacher/principal empowerment
3. flexible schedules
4. educational programs for parents and community

Differences between rural and non-rural schools

There were a few differences in the survey results as well. Those differences are best shown by comparing the actual rank-ordered lists in each surveyed category.

Priority of middle school structural components

Small Rural Schools	Non-Rural Schools
1. Interdisciplinary teams	1. Team houses
2. Block scheduling	2. Interdisciplinary teams
3. Flexibility	3. Block scheduling
4. Advisor/advisee	4. Flexibility
5. Grade configuration	5. Exploratory courses
6. Heterogeneous grouping	6. Heterogeneous grouping
7. Exploratory courses	7. Grade configuration
8. Interdisciplinary units	8. Advisor/advisee
9. Team houses	9. Interdisciplinary units
10. Intramural programs	10. Intramural programs

Discussion of priorities

The marked difference in rankings of the advisor/advisee program are interesting. Small rural school educators rated advisory much higher on their list of priorities than did non-rural schools. It would seem more logical for the opposite to occur since most rural schools are so small that rural educators often express the feeling that they know their kids very well, therefore an advisory program is not a top priority for them. However, this feeling is not prevalent among those who completed the survey. This could be attributed to the influence of the Platteville summer seminar, which promotes middle school concept implementation in all middle level schools, regardless of size. It may also reflect the belief among small school faculties that the program needs to provide a specific time and place when students' non-academic concerns can receive attention, and this need is unrelated to school size.

Since rural schools ranked team houses near the bottom of their list and non-rural schools ranked team houses on the top of their list, it seems that non-rural schools view houses

as the first priority, a means of achieving smallness within largeness. Rural schools, already having the smallness, find little value in the house concept, according to the rankings from this survey. It is interesting to note, however, that rural schools placed a high priority on interdisciplinary teaming, which is often seen as another way to create a sense of smallness out of largeness.

Problems/roadblocks to implementation of middle school structural components

Small Rural Schools	Non-Rural Schools
1. Scheduling	1. Scheduling
2. Shared staff	2. Low funding
3. Low funding	3. Shared staff
4. Limited facilities	4. Limited facilities
5. Limited in-service programs	5. Limited in-service programs
6. State mandates	6. State mandates
7. Remoteness	7. Busing
8. Busing	8. Poverty
9. Poverty	9. Lack of jobs for students
10. Lack of jobs for students	10. Remoteness

Discussion of problems and roadblocks

Rankings from both rural and non-rural educators seem consistent except in the remoteness item, which was to be expected. Small rural schools are often geographically remote and feel that such remoteness is a problem, therefore they ranked remoteness higher on the list of problems than did non-rural schools, which placed it at the bottom.

It is interesting that scheduling, shared staff, and low funding is ranked high on both lists. This is consistent with data collected at all of the state site meetings, but discussion

at those meetings pointed to unique differences in thinking about these topics.

For example, it was pointed out time after time that scheduling problems in small rural schools are generally the result of the middle level grades being a sub-unit of the larger K-8, K-12, or 7-12 building. In non-rural schools where the middle level grades are usually housed independent of the lower or upper grades, scheduling problems seem to be a result of entrenched thinking rather than a result of such things as shared staffing and bus schedules.

Solutions to roadblocks

Small Rural Schools	Non-Rural Schools
1. Staff development	1. Teacher/principal empowerment
2. Teacher/principal empowerment	2. Flexible schedule
3. Flexible schedule	3. Staff development
4. Parent/community in-service	4. Parent/community in-service
5. Networking with exemplary schools	5. Networking with exemplary schools
6. Middle level certification	6. Middle level certification
7. Alternative ways of testing	7. Connecting learning with life
8. Coordinating community resources	8. Coordinating community resources
9. Connecting learning with life	9. Alternative ways of testing
10. Waivers from state mandates	10. Waivers from state mandates

Discussion of solutions

Small rural schools placed staff development at the top of their list while non-rural schools indicated teacher/principal empowerment as their top priority. This seems consistent with prior findings that suggest the number one need of rural schools is access to faculty development opportunities.

While both groups placed waivers from state mandates on the bottom, it was surprising that small rural schools did so. Often, small schools have difficulty providing a program which meets all state requirements due to the constraints in staffing and resources. Therefore, it was expected that small rural schools would rank waivers from state mandates much higher.

Overall, the similarity of responses from the two groups reinforces the idea that the presumed differences, both in problems and solutions, between rural and non-rural schools are as much in perception as in reality. The perceived advantages of non-rural schools may be less than assumed. ❖

3

Looking for solutions

In order to gain greater insight from rural educators in regard to the problems that small rural schools face when implementing the middle school concept, 24 teams of teachers were selected for interviews. An interview instrument was constructed that would provide adequate structure and yield data on three areas:

(1) How focused is the school on middle school organization and structural components?
(2) Problems and roadblocks faced during transition to a middle school concept within the existing structure.
(3) Solutions that have worked in effectively implementing middle school structural components within a K-12, K-8, or 7-12 structure.

The teams interviewed represented schools with each of these grade configurations: 5-8, 6-8, and 7-12. Face to face interviews allowed additional insight into the survey responses and provided an opportunity for interviewed schools to expand on their survey responses, especially in the area of solutions to the problems of implementing the middle school concept.

The dialogue sessions held with each of the 24 teams from small rural schools are summarized below, grouped by each of the three major areas of concern: organization/ structural components, problems and roadblocks, and possible solutions.

Organization and structural components

Schools interviewed identified interdisciplinary teaming, common planning periods, and block scheduling as key middle school structural components with all three being equally important considerations when implementing a program that is responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents. However, only one-third of those same schools had interdisciplinary teams, block schedules, or flexible scheduling.

Data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (Rottier & Peppard, 1990) indicate that only 35% of the middle level schools surveyed in Wisconsin reported interdisciplinary organization with block scheduling. This is consistent with the interview results.

Over half of the rural schools interviewed had implemented the middle school structural components of exploratory courses and advisor/advisee programs. Comments suggested either earlier or perhaps easier implementation of these components within smaller student populations over components such as interdisciplinary teaming and block scheduling.

It was felt by a majority of those interviewed that middle school structural components were just as appropriate for students in grades nine and ten as for students in grades 6-8, and that small rural schools should seriously give consideration to implementation of those components in those grades.

Problems and roadblocks

When implementing middle school structural components, seven significant roadblocks were identified from most common to least common: (1) shared staff; (2) shared schedules and facilities with high school; (3) need for in-service training; (4) lack of block schedules; (5) limited physical facilities; (6) need for shared decision-making; and (7) limited funding.

During transition to the middle school concept, small rural schools seem to face many of the same problems as non-rural schools. However, the predominant roadblock among small rural schools was the heavy reliance on shared staff, shared facilities, and shared schedules between the middle level grades and the high school grades. Reducing the number of shared staff, allowing teachers to teach "out of field," and utilizing alternative schedules seemed to be top priorities of small rural schools.

Possible solutions

Through the interview process, many practical solutions to identified problems were discovered. The top seven solutions reported from most common to least were: (1) staff in-service program efforts; (2) phase in interdisciplinary teams with common planning periods; (3) establish a block schedule; (4) attend a summer institute; (5) develop a five year transition plan; (6) empower teachers; and (7) reduce shared staffing.

Since a major value of the interview process was in the collection of many innovative and practical solutions to the problems/roadblocks identified earlier, a listing of all possible solutions given by interviewed teams is given in Figure 1. The listing is by frequency of the proposed solution within each interview category, with the most often mentioned solution listed first.

Interviews: other recommendations

During the interview process, many educators volunteered information not asked for on the interview form. The information was often of such value that the interviewers recorded everything possible. Included in Chapter 4 are many of the other ideas derived from the discussion of possibilities for implementing small rural middle schools. ❖

FIGURE 1

Solutions to Identified Problems

Professional development and decision making

- Ongoing and long-range staff development programs
- Continual updating and monitoring of progress
- School site visits and teacher exchange programs
- Networking with model schools
- Teacher/principal empowerment to make changes
- Task force to study needs/conduct research
- Setting long-term goals
- Developing a 5-year plan
- Professional development, seminar attendance
- Middle level certification and endorsements for staff and administrators
- Developing trust and communication structures
- Site-based management
- Bringing in outside change agents
- Consistent discipline procedures
- Flexible staff options to change teaching assignments

Middle school philosophy

- In-service programs on middle school philosophy
- Teacher teams, responsible for all students
- Teacher ownership of programs
- Positive and caring school climate
- Developing and writing a school philosophy
- Taking time to implement new changes
- Middle level certification
- Recognition that change is evolutionary
- Promotion of positive attitudes toward change
- Hiring staff with emphasis on elementary certification
- Involving parents and community with the school program

Middle school organization

- Using a middle school/interdisciplinary teaming structure
- Common planning time for each team
- Phasing in middle school structures
- Flexible schedule not controlled by the high school
- Block scheduling
- Using activity periods and homerooms
- Advisor/advisee programs
- Reducing the number of shared staff
- Rearranging classroom assignments

Parent/school/community relationships

- Parent/community educational programs on the middle school concept
- Gaining support from parents, school board, and community
- Establishing a school/community task force to study needs
- Involving parents/community within the school
- School district referendum to build new middle school
- Studying school district boundary changes
- New building to house a 6-8 population
- Connecting with community services
- Networking local, county, state, and federal resources
- Coordinating services
- Establishing private business partnerships
- Establishing volunteer programs

Funding

- Reducing shared staffing
- Hiring additional staff
- Increasing funding for ongoing staff development programs
- Building new facilities
- Increasing federal grants
- Using private business partnerships and grants
- Reorganizing grade configuration
- Increasing funding for long-range planning

4

Pursuing solutions

Although faced with constraints and limitations not experienced in larger schools, small rural schools have tremendous potential for meeting the needs of young adolescents. For example, their small size encourages the cultivation of a family atmosphere that larger schools have to work diligently to create. Outside of the parents, the rural teacher is often the most significant adult role model for students. Rural teachers usually know the families of their students and know students well on a relatively personal level. Lines between the school, the home, and the community are often blurred as the school is the cultural and activity center for the local population. With these advantages, all of which are central to the middle school philosophy, why haven't educators in rural areas been more active in middle level educational reform and renewal?

In part it is because rural educators feel isolated, not just physically but psychologically; they feel that they are out of the educational mainstream. Funding problems often stand in the way of professional development or school-related travel that would keep them in touch with current programs, movements, and reforms.

There seems to be a pervasive pessimism concerning change. Shared staffing between the middle level grades and the high school almost always puts the high school in the driver's seat. Scheduling is controlled by the high school. In addition, teachers in the middle level grades who are high school trained compound the problem. Middle level education

generally thrives when it is directed by persons who are advocates for young adolescents, a condition more likely to be found in elementary teachers.

The perceptions and conditions that are viewed as handicaps need to be challenged. Although the constraints of being small and rural along with the difficulties associated with implementation of the middle school concept are real, the implementation of teacher teams, block schedules, exploratory courses, and teacher advisory programs are simply tools to assist teachers in developing an appropriate curriculum for young adolescents. Large numbers are not as necessary as generally believed.

Block scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming support the integration of curriculum around themes that are significant to young adolescent learners. Advisory programs allow young adolescents to address topics in the affective domain, topics which are seldom dealt with in academic classes. Exploratories give young adolescents opportunities to experience a wide variety of interests and areas in which they may identify interests or aptitudes.

None of these structural components, however, guarantee an environment appropriate for young adolescents. That environment can only be created when educators who work with young adolescents day after day wish it to happen and take the necessary steps for such an environment to exist. Structural components alone won't do it. Education is a humanistic enterprise dependent upon the interaction between classroom teacher and child. The school culture and its climate have to be inviting and supportive. Nothing else is or should be more important than that. The middle school concept is more attitudinal than organizational.

To ensure and enhance both the academic and affective climates for young adolescents small rural schools can and should take action in each of the following areas.

Professional development and planning for change

The most frequently cited solution to the problems associated with implementation of the middle school concept in small rural schools seems to be the availability of effective in-service programs. In these schools, in-service programs must be affordable; therefore, they should utilize all available state and local resources.

Before scheduling specific staff development programs, each school should involve its faculty in dialogue about the school's needs. Meetings should be scheduled with the superintendent, school board, and parents as integral parts of planning for change and should be scheduled as part of the overall in-service program.

Schools beginning a change process should discuss thoroughly their philosophy, clarify it, and summarize it into a mission statement. The school should also select a task force or steering committee to carry out the assessment of current practices, develop the long-range plan, and create a timeline and calendar of change activities.

To improve the chances of a successful change process, schools should also include site visits to good middle schools of similar enrollment size whenever possible. Using outside consultants is valuable, particularly if the consultants can maintain close, ongoing ties with the school. But when consultants are not affordable, having the faculty read in common appropriate professional resources and discuss them can be a viable alternative.

A plan for reform must also consider facilities, community resources, and ways to communicate with community services. Where local funding is inadequate, federal, state, and local grants, or private business partnerships should be pursued.

Curriculum and instruction

This particularly critical area could be the area of greatest opportunity for major reform in small rural schools. Curricular changes such as those advocated by the National Middle School Association and various curriculum leaders in the middle school movement continually remind us that curriculum for young adolescent learners must be relevant to their lives, must provide opportunities for students to apply concepts in the solving of real world problems posed to them by the community in which they live, and must provide opportunities to develop those skills needed to function effectively in our changing world (Beane, 1993).

The implications for the middle level curriculum are enormous. For example, it is increasingly apparent that we cannot assume that adults really understand what is relevant in the lives of young adolescents. We must ask them. Young adolescents need to be actively involved in curricular planning with faculty and staff. In a small rural school where faculty and students already know one other well, this can be accomplished more easily than in larger settings that are likely to be somewhat impersonal.

The curriculum should provide a wide variety of experiences in problem solving, critical thinking, and the development of research skills. Connecting knowledge, processing new information, communicating ideas, applying skills, and sharing ideas cooperatively are all essential responsibilities of a middle level curriculum. The curriculum's underlying premise must be "everything is exploratory," for that is the nature of young adolescents who are curious and adventuresome.

The integration of subject matter from the various disciplines is absolutely necessary if middle level students are to acquire the wide range of skills and understandings necessary to solve real world problems. No societal

problem has a single subject area solution. Instead, solving real problems requires the meshing together of knowledge and skills from multiple content or subject areas in formulating a solution.

Nevertheless, most middle level schools continue to structure their instructional program in a departmentalized fashion. They continue to promote the teaching of content and subject areas in isolation, hoping the students, who are primarily concrete learners, will see the connectedness of those subjects. Schools fail to provide a structure that will assist teachers in explicitly demonstrating the connectedness of knowledge and skills from a variety of subjects or content areas.

In small rural schools a wonderful opportunity to change this exists. Teachers can team and integrate curriculum, even if the team is only comprised of two teachers. Also, a single teacher who has several subjects to teach in the same day can readily fuse courses together to provide connectedness for students.

Often, many grade levels are located at the same site in rural schools, so they often have a unique opportunity to attempt multi-age groupings, a concept rapidly finding favor in middle level schools. By including students of different ages on teams and then grouping and regrouping those students for activities based on interests, skill development in specific areas, learning styles, the need for remediation or enrichment, gender, or other bases makes sense. Many small rural schools already do so out of necessity, not realizing fully its positive potential. Many more small schools could do so out of a concern for meeting the needs of all students.

Working in a block-of-time schedule, teachers can arrange to work with even smaller numbers of students at times, thus meeting individual needs. Cooperative learning strategies, portfolios and other alternatives to traditional assessment, and both small group and individual exploration

should be familiar approaches to all middle level teachers and should be considered just as important in the rural school as in the non-rural schools.

And finally, as more and more educators are starting to realize that in today's information society the day of the teacher-as-knowledge-giver is over; and with that realization the day of the teacher as exclusively a single subject specialist is over. Small rural school teachers have an opportunity to model appropriate curriculum integration as they usually have to teach several subjects and wear a variety of "hats" as part of their day to day work.

Interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time

An interdisciplinary team is a group of two or more teachers from differing disciplines who teach a common group of students and meet regularly to share their resources, interests, expertise, and knowledge and to coordinate their instruction.

Teaming can lead to: cross-over and multi-aged groupings, integrated/thematic instruction, flexible grouping of students, consistent discipline procedures, many forms of cooperation, increased teacher and student morale, a sense of ownership in the teams, increased parent communication and involvement, team newsletters and reports, and the development of a team calendar test schedule. Interdisciplinary teaming can prove valuable in many of these and other ways, most of which are unrelated to school size.

Small rural schools should organize the teachers into teams. Sometimes the team would contain only a two teacher/two subject team. In other cases, it could be a two teacher/four subject or two teacher/three subject team. A team can be multigrade – a coming thing. Some curricular integration across subject lines is better than none. Young adolescents need to see the interrelationships of content areas

that do exist so they can better solve problems, create new understandings, and enrich their understanding of the world.

Providing common planning time for the teachers that comprise a team is essential. The chance to plan together tears down the walls of the factory model school in which teachers teach in isolation all day, bereft of the benefits of mutual sharing of ideas and planning together with colleagues. The team should meet daily and, if necessary, even before or after school. Varying the starting or release time of students one day each week can provide additional planning time for teams. Imaginative administrators can provide some common planning time regardless of the usual barriers.

Block scheduling

Block scheduling offers a way to incorporate flexibility into the school program. By providing each team with a single, large block of time the team can take responsibility for the scheduling, size and nature of groups, curriculum content, and course offerings. For example, a two person/four subject teaching team could be given a four hour block of time and a team of students that they can group and regroup for various purposes within that four hour block. The team then makes scheduling and grouping decisions based on their knowledge of the needs of their students. By being able to control the schedule within that block, a number of activities such as field trips, laboratories, debates, and enrichment activities that require more than a 45 minute period can be carried out without affecting others in the school.

Advisory programs

The affective needs of students are rarely met in regular academic classrooms, even in small rural schools except on an incidental basis. Small class size and teachers' knowledge about students don't guarantee that personal-social

concerns are dealt with adequately in the school. Typically, the concern in classes is with academic content, whether the school is a small rural or a non-rural one. Yet, middle level students, irrespective of where they live, are at a critical stage of development and they ought to have a unique program of guidance, regardless of school size. An advisory program is one way to provide for this need.

Advisory programs are probably the most difficult middle school component to implement successfully – and they are wisely often left until later in the change process, perhaps the third or fourth year of a five-year plan.

Reducing the length of class periods, the amount of passing time, or the length of lunch periods are ways to gain some time for advisory within the schedule. The gained time is then placed into a 20 to 25 minute time slot two, three, or five days a week. Many schools use such an activity period for clubs one day, advisory three days, and/or school-wide assemblies one day. Others put mini-courses, alternating with advisory period, in the activity period. Still other schools extend the traditional homeroom – which is essentially administrative (lunch count, announcements, attendance, etc.) – twice a week to provide some 20-plus minutes for advisory activities and interactions. There is now an abundance of materials available to assist teachers in instituting an advisory program and selecting activities.

Monthly themes may be established in a calendar format with a variety of suggested activities. Setting a monthly calendar of activities and providing copies of possible activities for teachers are often responsibilities of the counselor or an appointed advisory program coordinator. Study halls can be appropriately replaced by the advisory program or at least changed into learning centers allowing peer tutoring, cross-age tutoring, teacher resource, and mentorships.

Exploratories

Middle level students deserve ample opportunities to participate actively in various areas of potential interest to expand their knowledge, determine their aptitudes, and broaden their horizons. The mini-course route may work well for small rural schools, as it does with Galena Middle School (Chapter 5). Mini-courses often fulfill an advisory function as students are actively involved in a small group setting where the teacher can work alongside students, talking, listening, and providing a climate for valuable interaction.

For example, one teacher described to us how she used quilting as an advisory activity. As she quilted with students, topics related to the advisory program's theme for the month were addressed. She stated that it was the first time she really developed a relationship with students that went beyond their viewing her as a "teacher." The hobbies and avocations of faculty members always provide an adequate basis for a program of short-term enrichment experiences. ❖

5

Two successful small rural schools

Many small rural schools have been actively involved in the middle school movement for years. This chapter presents case studies of two such schools. The descriptions presented are slightly edited transcripts from videotaped presentations made by representatives of those schools, including the principals, teachers, and parents. The words of these educators are strong testimonies to what can be done in small rural schools that wisely seek to implement the middle school concept.

Galena Middle School, Galena, Illinois
Dale Henze, Principal

Galena Middle School has about 325 students in grades 5 through 8. The grade levels vary a lot in size, from 62 to 90 students in a grade level.

Interdisciplinary teaming and interdisciplinary units

When we decided to implement interdisciplinary teaming, some teachers had taught for about 127 years and just knew that they could not teach math or knew they couldn't be a language arts or social studies teacher. Three years later, we surveyed 30 full-time staff members. Only a part-time staff person was opposed to interdisciplinary teaming and he was only slightly opposed.

We like teaming because it creates a family atmosphere. The teachers are very protective of their kids, and kids take a lot of ownership in their teachers. It leads to common respect and camaraderie between teachers and kids.

An example ... previously, before teaming, you could go into our lounge and rip a 6th grade kid pretty good. If you wanted to do that now, you'd better be careful because if a sixth grade teacher is sitting in there you are going to get it; they're very protective of their kids. Kids belong to the teachers and the teachers belong to the kids.

We have a team for sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade. That leaves two people who are not on a team; and that has bothered us, and I think it has bothered them. This speaks to the strength of the teams, because these people want to be on a team.

Another real strength of teaming is that our teams all have a common prep period every day, which allows us to do a lot of things. If we have a student that the team wants to meet with, then they can meet with that student and talk about any problems they have with him or her. If a parent calls in, we have parent conferences during common planning time or their team time.

There is a big difference between team teaching and organizing by interdisciplinary teams. There is one teacher in the room. It is fairly traditional from that standpoint. We don't have two teachers teach social studies during one period. We don't have blocks per se. Our kids move from room to room. If they have six academic courses, they are not moving to six different teachers a day. They have only three teachers who will teach all six of those courses.

Interdisciplinary units within interdisciplinary teaming – we really need to incorporate more of those. The sixth grade does a whole Egyptian unit. They're doing an interdisciplinary unit in May around the Olympics. The PE teacher is setting up a day for the Olympics; the medals are all made.

We are drawing in some of the other teachers to do other things.

Concerns about teaching out of a content specialty

Illinois has a K-9 certificate and a 6-12 certificate, and if you have 18 hours in a major teaching assignment, then you can teach another subject with just one college course in that subject. Teaching a subject with so limited college preparation makes some teachers extremely nervous. They think they can't teach math. My philosophy is that if you have a teaching certificate and you are teaching seventh graders science, and you are at a point that you don't have the ability to teach seventh grade math, then I am extremely nervous about having you in the building. Anyone who has a teaching certificate certainly ought to be capable of teaching anything through the eighth grade, in my opinion.

The interesting thing that happened (from teaming) when teachers began to teach out of their subject areas is that those who were involved in the teams really enjoyed the variety. The teachers who used to teach nothing but math now get to teach a literature course and talk about poetry, novels and short stories. They love it! The teachers who taught nothing but social studies are now teaching a math course. It's really interesting to get their reactions to teaming. They really like it. They really do.

A parent's point of view on teaming

What I found with having both of my boys going through teaming is that I am able to contact any "one" of his team teachers, and find out what is going on with my child. I don't have to go to a math teacher, and then go to a reading teacher, and then go to a social studies teacher; I can contact any of those teachers and they can tell me this is where he is having problems, this is what I see or the team sees.

Also, when you go to conferences you sit down with a team. You don't confer individually with the teachers. The team discusses as a group what they see my child doing. It's easy to have a conference about your child.

We used to have parents come to the middle school for conferences and they nearly had to stay overnight. Now they have three slots and catch three teams of teachers. It's nice too, because when you meet with four or five of your child's teachers, you hear the same thing four or five times. So the team can present their concerns. And you know from dealing with kids they're the same. When he's not doing his homework in social studies, he's probably not doing it in English or math. So conferencing under the team concept has been really positive.

About the homeroom

Our grades are randomly split into homerooms. In eighth grade, we have homerooms 8-1, 8-2, and 8-3. Students move with their homeroom group. They're a unit before they are a grade. There are three homerooms in a grade. The only course they don't move with their homeroom, within the academic courses, is math. Math is ability-grouped.

Exploratory program

Our exploratory program meets for a regular 40 minute period three days a week. The other two days the students have study hall. Our exploratory last year was in the morning. This year we moved it to the afternoon. At the beginning of the year a sheet is sent out to parents and students. It is an explanation of each of the courses being offered for exploratories. Then there is a sheet at the back where the students rate their choices for each six week period. Each exploratory lasts for six weeks and then students move to a new one for the next six weeks. The students indicate their

choices. Then the principal schedules them into classes. We always try to give them either their first or second choice.

This year, we have offered such things as babysitting basics, three ceramic sessions, Trivial Pursuit, fly tying, and needlepoint. The largest class has fifteen students in ceramics. Some, like Trivial Pursuit, are as small as five students.

I absolutely love teaching an exploratory. I come from a small parochial school where I taught a third and fourth grade combination classroom. Now, I am teaching at a middle school. I had never worked with 7th or 8th graders before and had always thought of them as the "bad guys." I never wanted to work with them; was not comfortable with them. Now, I have totally changed my thinking. I really love what I am doing; and really like working with the exploratory program. I get to know kids that I wouldn't get to know otherwise. After I have them for six weeks in an exploratory, when they see me in the hall they speak to me; I speak to them; we talk. I have gotten to know almost all of the 8th graders this way; about 65 students. It is a chance for me and the other teachers to get to know the kids outside the academic classroom.

This past six weeks of ceramics, I had two boys who were the "jocks" of the school – football, all sports. I thought, "They're in ceramics? This is going to be neat." But they were fine. They weren't particularly thrilled about being in there. It was not their first or second choice. But, we found baseball and football steins for them to create. They loved it! They were good, no problems occurred, and they were happy with what they had done.

For the exploratory, six weeks is long enough. These kids have a short attention span. If they happen to get into something and find out that they don't like it, or it's not what they thought it was going to be – it's only six weeks. They will be out of there and can move on to something else. We have a variety of classes for them to choose from.

On using non-professional or non-certified teachers for exploratories

We have had people come in on a temporary basis for a day. In Total Teen for Girls, we have had a beautician visit and talk about hair care and personal image. But to ask someone to obligate time for three days a week for six weeks, is a major commitment for someone in the community to make, so we have not done that. And one of the advantages of using all our people in the building and not going outside for help is that our kids get to see us in a different light, not just as academic teachers.

It is also interesting to watch the socialization among middle school students while they are in exploratories. For example, in ceramics, as they are painting a lot of social things are going on as students talk about home, life, and school. I feel this is a positive thing for middle school kids to be doing.

Student advisory program

Our student advisory program is new. We spent a lot of time last year writing it. Two teachers from each grade developed and wrote the program for their grade, since we have a different program for each grade level. We choose students for our advisory groups by lottery. For example, all 7th grade teachers sit around a table with the list of all seventh grade boys and girls. They do the girls first. There was a number one draft choice. The teacher with the first draft choice chooses first, the teacher with the second draft choice chooses next, and so on. It goes on until all of the girls are evenly dispersed and then we draft the boys. We always seem to end up with a wonderful mix of kids.

And we tell the kids that, "You were chosen by me." And that is a really neat concept because the kids are going, "Oh, I wouldn't of necessarily chosen you." But they are not told who is chosen first or who is chosen last.

I had some reservations about advisory at first. I said, "Oh , it's guidance. I have no experience at this." Well, it really is not the same as guidance. My job as an advisor is much the same as a facilitator in an encounter group or some sort of a counseling group, but I don't do a whole lot of counseling. It's more facilitating; the resource role that I perform is very well explained in our advisor guidebook.

The advisory calendar is included in the guidebook. As part of the program, we have thirty-six silent, sustained reading days on Fridays. In looking at the program, there are many, many more activities than what we have time to do this year. At the end of this year, it will be nice going back and slicing out a lot of overkill on friendship units, manners, goal setting, or decision making because we have more to do than we can possibly do. I would take more units and make them two day or three day units rather than one day; as many of the lessons are set out.

We also have incorporated more physical activity days, gym days in advisory. We all go into the gym and have a tug of war or some related activity, getting away from the paper and pencil activities. We have roller skating and don't do any sort of "how I feel about this" kind of day or "what is my opinion on this." We know that one change we will make in our advisory program is less paper-pencil stuff.

Philosophy of change to middle school concept

Whenever you are dealing with the middle school – the change, you need to constantly keep the focus on what's best for students. When we were making changes, we were not primarily concerned about the adults. We didn't talk about preparation time for teachers or about what was important for staff. We somehow got our teachers to constantly focus upon what was best for the kids in our building. If you can do that with your staff that is two-thirds of the battle. Keep it focused on what is the best for those kids.

Clay Central-Everly Middle School,
Royal, Iowa
Kevin Vickery, principal

If you are a dreamer come in
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
a hoper, a prayer, a magic bean buyer
If you are a pretender come sit by my fire
so we have some flax and tall-tales to spin.

— by Shel Silverstein

This is middle school. If you're not a hoper, if you're not a prayer, if you don't need to buy a magic bean, then middle school is not the place to be, because middle school has to be where you can pretend and where you can dream. And that is what we, at Clay Central-Everly Middle School, believe in desperately and this is what our students need and staff members should be – middle schools should be a student-centered building.

Clay Central-Everly consists of two communities, primarily. We are what we call a whole program sharing district. We have two districts in identity as far as the state is concerned. However, all of the middle school students come to our building for middle school and all of the high school students from both districts go to the other district for high school classes.

We do not share our building with any high school students; this is wonderful. We do share staff with both the high school and elementary school, but we have overcome that hurdle. The two elementary schools feed into our middle school, and all of our middle school students go as a group to the high school.

We are a small community of about 500 people on one side and about 570 on the other side. Enrollment in middle

school is 124. There are eighteen staff members in the building including those that are part-time, and the three shared with the high school and the two shared with the elementary.

Building schedule

We do not have any bells in our building, although we run a ten period day. The first two periods are for exploratory classes. These classes are not elective courses. All students in each grade must take all eight of them. They meet for a nine week period and are 30 minutes long.

We do offer three foreign languages in the high school so we also offer three foreign language exploratories in our middle school. We have one person who teaches the Spanish class who is also an elementary principal on the side. We have a German teacher who is a home economics teacher as well, and then we teach French through the interactive TV system. And those aren't taught all at the same time. There are nine weeks of French, nine weeks of Spanish, and nine weeks of German – only introductions, explorations into each of those three areas.

All of our exploratory classes are ungraded. Students in exploratory classes are given satisfactory, satisfactory plus, or unsatisfactory rather than the usual A-B-C-D-F.

Third, fourth, and fifth period constitute the academic core. Lunch period is 27 minutes long. In the afternoon, the students all have P.E. The sixth graders have it right after lunch; that gives them extra time to change so it doesn't cut into their activity period, but it also gives those sixth graders who need to stretch their growing bones a chance in the middle of the day to do that.

Seventh and eighth grades take P.E. together in a 50 minute period. Then we have band and chorus, sixth graders first, and then the seventh and eighth graders who have it at

the end of the day. When they're not in physical education or music they are finishing up with their academic classes.

We start the day with activities that the kids like to do. They spend the first thirty minutes of their day drawing, if that's what they like to do, or working on the computer, or learning a little bit about their self-esteem, or learning a little French or Spanish. We also have homebase, our advisor-advisee program, every morning to focus everyone together.

We use the rest of the morning for academics – language, reading, social studies, math, and science. All three grades have the same five core courses. We stretch in the middle of the day, and then we finish up again with a fun activity. So our schedule was designed to meet the needs of the students, not meet the convenience of the teachers.

Homebase program

Homebase is what we call our advisory program. People are afraid of labels they don't understand, so we give it a label that they do understand. Homebase implies a safe haven. In playing tag, you always had a homebase; therefore, it's a safe place for kids to be. Parents seem to understand that. We run Homebase for 20 minutes each morning.

Communication with community

One of the things we feel is important is communication with the community. Our weekly newsletter goes home with students. We also have a monthly newsletter, which is mailed to every patron in the district whether they have children in school or not. We have the typical parent conferences, open houses, but we also have some things which we feel are unique to the middle school.

One of those is our assignment booklet which we have customized to serve as a passport into classrooms. Students

write down their assignments in this booklet and every Monday when they return to school, their parents must have signed it. We check that during Homebase.

It also has an 'important things to remember' section. If kids did really well on a test, or there are problems, such things can be recorded there. It also can serve as a notice of future tests. The assignment booklet is something that has really helped our kids organize themselves as well as helped us to stay on top of kids.

In addition, we also have a weekly progress report for students who are struggling, or for parents who just want to be better informed of their child's progress. The report shows whether the student's assignments are up to date, what participation has been like, conduct, and comments. These reports are personalized and are not generated from a standard form.

Teaming

We have a team meeting every day for all of our non-exploratory core teachers. On Fridays we meet early, and that team meeting includes all of the exploratory teachers as well as the core teachers.

There is a set agenda for these meetings. For example, on Mondays we always deal with students, particularly those who are considered to be at-risk. Monday is the day when the school psychologist is present and can participate. Since every student in the middle school is at-risk at some time in some way, every student will probably be discussed at some team meeting on a Monday.

Wednesday we have student conference days. We invite in one 6th grader, one 7th grader, and one 8th grader and ask them to tell us some of the strengths that they see in our school or some of the things that we might want to work on.

This has been a very positive experience for both teachers and students. It improves the lines of communication so that students feel that they can come to us. We do that with each child once a year.

Tuesdays and Thursdays are devoted to interdisciplinary planning. Because we are such a small district we really only have one team. And in our one team, we have all of the core teachers. Also, we usually have one exploratory teacher who is not having a class at that particular time and can be a part of the team meeting. They are the link with the rest of the exploratory teachers.

We have a team leader who prepares an agenda every day. That sets the air for the meeting to be positive and not a gripe session. We go through everything on the agenda every day, and we really do accomplish a great deal.

We also have a recorder who prepares a written report of what we do daily and then makes copies for the exploratory people who are not able to be present. A timekeeper is identified to keep things going.

We also have a public relations person who makes sure that we put stories in the newspaper so that people in the community will know what that team planning time is used for.

Each core teacher has an individual planning period as well before meeting with students. Because we have those exploratories that are 30 minutes, the total amount of teacher preparation time is 60 minutes. That all happens in the morning opposite the exploratories.

We've heard several schools say that they're losing their team planning time, and we've tried to keep it. One of the things we've done is invite board members to attend team planning time so they can see its value. We've also made sure that the parents recognize its importance. We do that by inviting them to come in. When you have both parents and

board members see how much we accomplish, it's harder to take it away.

Service learning

Our students help out with community projects. For example, near the school we have about twenty miles of road that we clean up. We also have a recycling project and weigh all the waste paper each week. The kids figure out how many trees they're saving each week. We also run a peer tutoring program. In Homebase, we have other activities in which students work together on service ideas.

Improvements since implementing the middle school concept

We changed our testing program from a late winter norming period to an early fall period. We saw a growth in our seventh and eighth grade of 1.2 years over a four month period.

This year, we had 40 discipline referrals to the office as compared to the average of 280 referrals per year before we had implemented any of the middle school concept.

We believe that the important thing to remember when implementing the middle school concept is to set your own pace. You can't do everything your first year. We didn't, and there's a lot we still haven't done. Select these programs that the staff feels comfortable with and that meet the needs of your students. The early successes will lead to more improvements. ❖

6

Smallness—turning presumed liabilities into assets

Small rural schools can take steps to better meet the needs of young adolescents, despite recognized constraints. Instead of continuing traditional practices that conflict with what we know about young adolescents and bemoaning their limitations, small rural schools need to take greater advantage of their strengths with the inherent benefits of smallness, and transform and renew themselves while implementing such middle school components as block scheduling, teaming, advisory programs, exploratory opportunities for students, and the integration of curriculum.

There is, of course, no ideal packaged middle level change process, no one right way, that can be purchased and effectively implemented. No two schools, no two communities, no two situations are exactly the same. Each school must develop its own unique program that addresses the needs of that school, that student body, that community, and build on its strengths. Every school community has a particular strength, and that strength must be a central part of any transition. Also, networking with other rural schools is an effective way for staffs to share strategies and gain information from exemplary programs. Whether by computer, telephone, video, or travel, networking with like-minded colleagues gives the support that leads to action.

Curriculum in the small rural middle school must connect learning with life and the community. Again smallness is an advantage when utilization of the community as a learning laboratory is desired. The curriculum must be

refocused toward teaching skills and processes that will equip students as lifelong learners. In fact, without curriculum reform as the central focus and concern in the small rural school, structural components will have little impact and no lasting benefit for students. Mistakes made in the educational past will resurface as educators become trapped in the "what comes around, goes around" circle of educational reforms, reforms which are little more than mere tinkerings. Small schools are in an excellent position to break that cycle, to make meaningful changes in curriculum, and to step out in the curriculum integration reform now ongoing. Such reforms are consistent with what we know about young adolescents and their world. If the educational issue of the 90s is curriculum, then small rural schools must make curriculum their issue of the 90s as well.

Interdisciplinary teaming, block scheduling, flexibility, and student advisory programs are accepted as among essential features in the middle level educational program. They need to be incorporated in schools, no matter how small. Small teams and correspondingly small blocks of time may be called for, but it should be recognized that small teams are often more effective in integrating curriculum than large teams Appropriate in-service programs with teachers and principals empowered to make changes, and connecting parents and communities with the school are important conditions if real reform is to take place.

Creating effective communication networks within the school and the total educational community is essential. Teachers, students, administrators, school boards, parents, community businesses, and patrons all have a part to play in the change process. Creating a school task force or planning team should be an initial step in developing a five-year plan for making needed changes. Delivery of staff in-service programs is a highly significant solution for the implementation of a middle school philosophy; therefore building a staff development delivery system for rural schools is vital.

The same problems that exist in non-rural schools during a transition also exist in rural schools. The results of our surveys and interviews confirmed that there are many common problems facing any school changing from a traditional departmentalized structure to a middle school concept.

On the other hand, there are also some differences, most of which seem to be related to the constraints of shared staffing, lack of resources, and the lack of extensive professional development. Perhaps small rural schools only need access to more in-service programs and current technological resources for better implementation of the middle school concept. If that is true, then providing technology for professional development to rural areas would assist small rural schools in keeping close to current research and practice. Also, networking rural and small schools together in order to facilitate staff development for those in geographically remote areas seems vital to rebuilding a delivery system for current, up-to-date in-service programs.

Despite acknowledged limitations, small rural schools have some real advantages over much larger schools. These advantages should be exploited. For example, rural schools are probably in an ideal position to advocate change because of their size. Fewer layers of bureaucracy exist and changes can be implemented with smaller numbers of staff, all of whom already know one another well.

However, to change the fundamental structure of a school also requires courage and will – the courage to risk failure and the will to pick yourself up and move forward again when failure occurs. It also requires an understanding that change is unsettling; it does cause discomfort in many people, but that is as it should be. Without those feelings of discomfort, we may never be pushed to reflect on what we are doing, to realize what could be improved upon, and moved to act on that realization.

Small rural schools can and should be active participants in this most significant educational reform effort of the century – the middle school movement. A comment from one rural school educator made during an interview sums up what middle schools can be in small rural settings.

> *Creating a schedule on paper that works or implementing a middle school component in a school can be easy or difficult. But that isn't the real issue anyway. Middle school is more than schedules and components. A true middle school places the student at the center, and everything else it does emanates from that .*

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Appendix A – Survey One Instrument

School name _____

We're looking for a few good schools.....7-12 or K-12 or K-8 settings that have/are making adaptations of middle school components. Please check any and all that apply in your school setting.

Key Middle School Components

_ Interdisciplinary teams

_ Block scheduling

_ Team houses

_ Exploratory courses

_ No tracking

_ Advisor/advisee

_ Grade configuration 5-8, 6-8, or 7-8 in separate building

_ No shared staffing in core subjects with other levels

Curriculum

_ Clear mission statement for middle level

_ High parental involvement and support

_ High community involvement and support

_ Common planning time for teacher teams

_ Common students for teams

_ Academic core classes

_ Local curriculum development program separates middle level from elementary and high school

_ Cooperative learning/small group instruction is widely used

Student Centerdness

__ Developmental guidance program in place

__ Positive/caring school climate program in place

__ Award program in place

__ Classroom and school wide discipline program in place

__ Clubs and extracurricular activities are open to all students

__ Mentoring program for students

__ Peer tutoring/cross-age tutoring program in place

__ School is active in community

Staff Development

__ Positive faculty morale

__ Faculty is receptive to middle level concept

__ Shared/collaborative decision making in place

__ Teacher and principal empowerment is evident

__ Continuous school evaluation occurs

  __ North Central

  __ SEC

  __ Other

__ There is a plan for ongoing staff development

__ Staff is flexible (assignments change periodically

Key local problems/roadblocks to implementation of middle school components:

Unique local solutions/adaptations to implementation of middle school components:

Appendix B – Survey Two Instrument

MARS Project:
Helping Rural Schools Implement Middle School

Middle Level Alliance of Rural and Small Schools
Four state consortium (WI, MN, IL, IA)

School team _____

School district_____

Please help us by completing the following survey. We are working with the MARS project to develop ideas that will assist schools in implementation of middle school components.

We are focusing on the problems and solutions in implementation of middle school components, especially in K-12, K-8 and 7-12 buildings.

Thank you for your time and input!

Directions: Please rank each item listed one through ten (1-10) by the order of importance to <u>your school</u> with (1) being the most important to (10) being the least important.

<u>Organization/structures:</u> (rank order 1-10)

__ interdisciplinary teams
__ block scheduling
__ team houses
__ exploratory courses
__ intramural program
__ interdisciplinary units
__ flexibility
__ heterogeneous grouping
__ advisor/advisee program
__ grade configuration of 5-8, 6-8, or 7-8 in same building

Problems: (rank order 1-10)

__ lack of new money/low funding
__ shared staff with high school
__ poverty
__ busing
__ limited physical facilities
__ state mandates
__ scheduling
__ remoteness
__ lack of student employment opportunities
__ limited staff development opportunities

Solutions: (rank order 1-10)

__ middle level certification
__ staff in-service
__ parent/community in-service
__ networking schools and exemplary models
__ waivers from state mandates
__ coordinate community, regional, state resources
__ flexible schedule
__ connecting learning with business and life
__ teacher/principal empowerment to make changes
__ use alternative ways to test skills and abilities

Which of the above problems have you encountered that still remain as a roadblock?

What solutions have you successfully implemented? How did you start?

What changes are needed? What would you say is your greatest need for the school year 1991-1992?

What problems or solution have been encountered that are not listed?

Open comments:

ISBN 1-56090-095-4

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National Middle School Association
2600 Corporate Exchange Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43231

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